

# Potential mill developer meets Plainwell community

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About 75 Plainwell residents came to the city's community center Tuesday, June 9, to meet potential mill developer Conestoga-Rovers and Associates.

In April, the Plainwell Brownfield Redevelopment Authority chose CRA out of three candidates to move forward in the process.

At the city's third public meeting concerning the redevelopment of the former Plainwell Paper Mill site, city manager Erik Wilson said it was about input.

"We cannot do it alone," he said.

In addition to the community, Wilson said development also included partners such as CRA and Weyerhaeuser.

An agreement has not been signed yet, but Wilson said the next step would be to submit a letter of intent, then outline the project once the city and CRA negotiated.

He said a development agreement would be "the deal."

"It will reinforce guiding principles and the mill concept plan," Wilson said. "And there will be future workshops to come."

In his introduction, Wayne Bauman of CRA said he had a real understanding of Plainwell and the property.

Bauman is from southwest Michigan and he is the current manager of the CRA Kalamazoo office, which is also home to CRA's U.S. construction division.

He said the reason why CRA was interested in the site was because they saw a "hidden jewel in southwest Michigan."

According to Bauman, CRA has more than 20 years experience working with paper mills including the former Rock Tenn site in Otsego and the clean-up of the former Rockwell International site in Allegan.

Bauman said another strength was the relocation of his Kalamazoo office to Plainwell. He plans to move onto the mill site with 30 employees to become a part of the community.

Bauman said a development agreement could take months because the city and CRA had to agree on concepts and goals.

Once that was settled, a conceptual schedule would include

- Building improvements in the first year in order for city hall and CRA to move

onto the property;

- In the second year, continue ongoing building demolition and improvements, a possible move for the public safety building and begin cleanup;

- Between one and 10 years, establish city and community approved development plans;

- Between three and 10 years, continue with development.

"In year one, we could have 50 people working on the property," Bauman said.

He said CRA would have a presence and access to the community.

"If we're not doing something right, we will hear about it," Bauman said.

Both Bauman and Wilson said patience was needed from the residents.

"It's a full-time job to negotiate the roles and responsibilities," Wilson said. "The development agreement has to take a long time."

Residents were able to voice their opinions during a question-and-answer session afterwards as well as fill out a survey asking them if CRA was the right fit for the city.

Mike Jones, an eight-year Plainwell resident, said he had concerns about CRA's

lack of a vision.

"They've done a lot of industrial work, but they have no experience with city development," he said. "I'm worried what a short-term decision will cost (for the city) in the long run."

On the other hand, Pat Vance, a five-year Plainwell resident and Bob Spagnoli, a 12-year Plainwell resident, were both impressed with CRA.

"They're well-qualified,"

Spagnoli said.

"I'm impressed they will move here on site," Vance said.

City council member Todd Overhuel, who was also part of the developer interviewing process, hoped the meeting was informational.

"I got a sense of excitement from the audience," he said.

Bauman also felt optimistic about the meeting.

"(The audience) asked

good questions," he said. "It shows their concerns."

He also looked forward to the future of Plainwell and the potential for development.

"We're looking at putting Plainwell on the map in 10 years," Bauman said.

For more information, contact Wilson at city hall at (269) 685-6821.

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